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Considerations For Scaling a Social Enterprise: Key Factors and Elements

Research Article

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Abstract: The number of social enterprises has grown exponentially in recent times. International research regarding how social enterprises scale is starting to emerge and is becoming an area of increased focus. Due to their hybridity, social enterprises experience unique scaling challenges, and research has started to examine these experiences. This theoretical paper reviews existing literature on social enterprise scaling and, based on this, proposes a conceptual model for understanding the interdependent factors and elements social enterprises must navigate when scaling. The proposed conceptual model will provide a base for further empirical research. When validated, it will also provide a practical tool for social enterprises exploring scaling possibilities and inform future enterprise and policy supports in this area.

Keywords: *Social enterprise, Social innovation, Scaling, Social impact, Social enterprise scaling model*

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INTRODUCTION

The number of social enterprises operating globally has grown exponentially over the past ten years. In 2016 3.2 per cent of the world's population had started a socially-minded venture, compared to 7.6 per cent who started a commercial venture (GEM, 2018). In the US, social businesses generate annual revenue of $500 billion annually and £60 billion in the UK (SEUK, 2021). While there are no definitive or recent figures specifically for Ireland, it is estimated that there could be 65,000 people employed in social enterprises in Ireland (Forfás, 2013). There are now multiple organisations worldwide supporting and promoting the work of social enterprises, such as the Diesis Network and the Social Enterprise World Forum. In addition, universities have seen demand for courses and formal education soar in popularity, with top universities such as Yale, Harvard, and INSEAD heavily investing in educating social entrepreneurs (Austin and Rangan, 2019). As a relatively new emerging sector, the focus has been on the start-up and operation of these enterprises, but as they develop, a key area of growing interest relates to how these enterprises scale.

In addition to contributing to the international literature on scaling in social enterprise, this paper is particularly relevant in an Irish context where there is growing interest in social enterprise following the launch of the first National Social Enterprise policy in 2019 (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2019), and subsequent strategies such as the Working to Change strategy (Department of Justice, 2020). Most social enterprises in Ireland are locally focused, but there are emerging cases where some have scaled their activities and impact in various

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ways. Although some research focuses on social enterprises in an Irish context, the primary focus is on WISE (Work Integrated Social Enterprise) social enterprise (O'Shaughnessy and O'Hara, 2016) with only one piece of research focused on growth (Hynes, 2009). This indicates the need for research to now explore the issue of scaling and inform theory, practice and policy. This paper does this by investigating the extant literature on scaling in social enterprise and contributes to debates around understanding factors and elements and how they interact within the scaling journey.

Global research into the scaling journey of social enterprises is emerging (Millar and Hall, 2013). Social enterprises face a different set of challenges in scaling than during the start-up phase (Ometto, Gegenhuber, Winter and Greenwood, 2019). Scaling a social enterprise to achieve a more significant social impact is very different from scaling a commercial organisation, where the key priority is to meet profit-seeking goals. Commercial organisations often seek to find markets similar to the ones they are already successfully working in to scale into, as scaling into dissimilar contexts is deemed costly and very risky (Ghemawat, 2001). Social enterprises may seek out underserved populations where there are service gaps or where the financial viability of the market is insufficient to attract commercial enterprises. Consequently, the entry barriers for social enterprises may be higher than those for commercial ventures (Weber, Kroeger and Lambrich, 2012). Unsurprisingly, when it comes to scaling, the focus for commercial and social enterprises can be quite different, with social enterprises measuring scaling not solely by increasing the number of customers they engage with but instead on how their impact has grown in their community (Bloom and Chatterji, 2009) and focusing on serving those customers well (Dees, Anderson and Wei-Skillern, 2004). As Ormiston and Seymour (2011) emphasise, finding the right balance between mission and commercial objectives can be challenging when scaling a social enterprise.

Existing literature over the past twenty years highlights the complex barriers social enterprises face when scaling due to this dual motivation to achieve economical and societal value creation (Costanzo, Vurro, Foster, Servato and Perrini, 2014). When scaling, new challenges such as impact measurement, resources, and developing key processes are brought into focus (André and Pache 2016). Other barriers can exist in the funding of scaling endeavours – often, funders of social enterprises have a preference to fund new 'breakthrough' ideas (Bradach, 2003) or there may be challenges in the complex local knowledge of a new territory where acceptance may take some time (Austin, Stevenson and Wei-Skillern, 2006; Dees et al., 2004; Easter and Conway Dato-On, 2015; Smith and Stevens, 2010). Taylor, Dees and Emerson, (2002) highlight the pressure social enterprises may experience to scale their organisation. This pressure can come from a wide range of stakeholders such as funders, the community, and even from social entrepreneurs themselves who are eager to progress their careers or create a personal legacy.

There is much yet to explore in terms of the scaling of social enterprises. The extant literature is fragmented as it typically explores one facet of the scaling process in isolation and does not adequately reflect or explore the interconnectedness of the factors and elements associated with scaling or examine the process of scaling in its entirety**.** This paper reviews existing literature on social enterprise scaling and, based on this, proposes a conceptual model of social enterprise scaling. The conceptual model increases insights and understanding of the factors and elements that a social enterprise navigates when scaling and how they interact with each other. This more holistic and interconnected conceptual model provides a base for further empirical research and discourse among researchers in the social enterprise domain. Once validated empirically, it will also provide a valuable practical tool for social enterprises exploring scaling possibilities and will inform enterprise and policy supports in this area.

UNDERSTANDING THE SCALING OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

The primary focus of scaling a social enterprise is usually to create social impact. This separates a commercial and impact-driven social enterprise in their scaling agenda (Weber et al., 2012)**.** To understand where this research is situated, it is important to be clear on what is meant by the term scaling social impact. Researchers have proposed numerous definitions of 'scaling social impact' (for example, André and Pache, 2016; Bacq and Eddleston, 2018; Blundel and Lyon, 2015; Bocken, Fil and Prabhu, 2016; Dees et al., 2004; Desa and Koch, 2014; Gauthier, Ruane, and Berry, 2019; Guha, 2019; Khare and Joshi, 2018; Kickul, Griffiths, Bacq and Garud, 2018; Lee and Restrepo, 2015; Lyon and Fernandez, 2012; Smith, Kistruck and Cannatelli, 2016). Many of these definitions focus on a narrow view of how social impact is scaled; for example, Dees et al., (2004 p.30) define scaling social impact as 'not just about serving more people – it should be about serving them well'. This definition does not take into consideration

a 'scaling deep' approach. Scaling deep is defined as the changing beliefs, values or relationships to bring about change (Moore, Riddell and Vocisano, 2015). Overall, these definitions vary slightly in the understanding of the concept and have led to considerable ambiguity and inconsistency around the use of the term, which impacts the approach to in-depth empirical research on the topic (Islam, 2020a). After reviewing these definitions, the definition put forward by Seelos and Mair, (2019, p.7), that defines scaling as 'activities that act on and improve existing knowledge, processes, products and services, or interventions to serve more people better', and the definition put forward by Islam, (2021 p.2) as 'scaling social impact refers to an ongoing process of increasing the magnitude of both quantitative and qualitative positive changes in society by addressing pressing social problems at individual and/or systemic levels through one or more scaling paths' represent the process of scaling and reflect the different types of scaling most appropriately. The authors put forward a slightly amended definition to capture the essence of Islam, (2020a) and Seelos and Mair, (2019) definitions: *Scaling social impact refers to the process of increasing the magnitude of quantitative and/or qualitative positive changes in society by expanding or adapting an organizations outcome to better address pressing social problems at individual and/or systemic levels.*

THE FACTORS AND ELEMENTS OF THE SCALING PROCESS

To date, existing models have presented different aspects of the scaling process, with limited exploration of the high-level cause-effect of decisions. This paper categorises existing models into six factors and drills down into sub-elements which seeks to clarify the scaling journey for social enterprises and bring to life the impact of decisions made during the journey. We seek to demonstrate how the various factors of scaling are interconnected and how that connectedness will interact with the outcome of the journey.

A social enterprise must consider what the ***driver or the motivation to scale*** is. Understanding the motivators to scale will help identify the ***form of scaling*** that is most impactful and reduce the potential for bias based on the social entrepreneur's preference for control (Smith et al., 2016). To scale impact, a social enterprise needs to understand the ***critical success factors*** (CSFs) for achieving social impact. This requires the social enterprise to examine, interrogate and test its assumptions, results and outcomes. The operational factors of the model include the decision of whether the social enterprise is ***ready to scale***, what ***capabilities*** it needs to enhance its ability to scale, and what ***supports*** will aid their scaling. The last piece of the model encompasses the decision about the best ***route to scaling*** for the social enterprise. Each of these factors are explored in more detail and specific elements highlighted in this paper. Table 1 acts as a guide for how the extant research is presented. A conceptual framework is presented at the end of the paper to propose how these factors and elements might interact. Further research to empirically test this conceptual model is planned.

In the existing literature, considerations are largely discussed independently, with few relationships explored. A scalability framework developed by Weber et al. (2012) is one of the only other attempts to create significant linkages between different factors of scaling; this theoretical model, whilst making a robust effort to connect the complex factors, presents a go/no go for scaling scenario and does not take adequate consideration of the adaptative journey to scaling where social enterprises need to revisit plans to reflect changing realities.

Table 2 below sets out the major scaling models presented by existing literature and references the links between factors. We will now discuss each of the factors, highlighting elements of factors in more detail and how they might interact with the process of scaling.

Factor: Drivers to scale for social enterprises

Elements**:** *Leader driven, Demand driven, Opportunity driven*

It is important for a social enterprise to identify what the key driver is for scaling, as this will impact which factors are more influential and what the social enterprise needs to focus its attention on. There are several drivers that prompt a social enterprise to consider scaling. The most common may be **demand-driven**, defined as 1) a different need within the cohort they are already serving, 2) the same need in a different community that their social enterprise can address, or 3) an inherent disadvantage or flaw in society that requires systemic change (Stirzaker, Galloway, Muhonen and Christopolous, 2021). Another less researched reason is **leader driven,** the personal desire of the social entrepreneur to scale (Smith et al., 2016). This mirrors commercial organisations where individual motivation is cited as one of the primary reasons for scaling (Cliff, 1998; Wiklund and Shepherd, 2003). Whilst there is a growing body of research into what inspires a social entrepreneur to start their journey in social enterprise (Dey and Lehner

Table 1: Description of each factor and element of social enterprise scaling

Factors	Considerations	Elements	Authors
Drivers to Scale	What is driving or motivating the social enterprise to scale?	Leader driven Demand-driven Opportunity driven	Cliff 1988 Shepherd 2003 Smith et al., 2016 Wiklund and Shepherd, 2003
Forms of Scaling	What form of scaling is most suitable to achieve the desired social impact?	Scale Deep Scale Up Scale-Out	Dees et al. 2004 Moore et al., 2015
Critical Success Factors	What are the critical social changes that need to be made to achieve the desired social impact?	Mission Unbundling Space Resource	Bradach and Grindle, 2014 Han and Shah, 2020 Lawrimore 2011 Mulgan 2006 Seelos and Mair 2005,2019
Routes to Scale	What are the practical routes to scaling available to achieve the desired social impact?	Bricolage Supply Demand Three-Step Strategies Pathway Models	Baker and Nelson, 2005 Dees et al. 2004 Elkington and Hartigan 2008 Lyon and Fernandez 2012 Mulgan, Tuck, Ali and Sanders 2007 Waitzer and Paul 2011
Readiness & Capabilities	How does the social enterprise currently stack up, what capabilities does it need to acquire and how does it identify them?	Barriers Resources Systems	Bloom and Chatterji 2009 Bloom and Smith, 2010 Cannatelli 2017 Dees et al. 2004 Gauthier et al., 2019 Mulgan et al. 2007 Weber, Kroeger et al. 2012
Supports	What external supports does the social enterprise need to leverage to achieve the desired social impact?	Financing External expertise Governance	Bacq and Eddleston, 2018 Han and Shah, 2020 O'Shaughnessy 2019 Elkington, Hartigan and Litovsky 2010 Santos, Pache and Birkholz 2015 Weber, Kroeger et al. 2012

Table 2: Links between factors referred to in existing literature:

Reference	Linkage
Bloom and Chatterji (2009)	Capabilities to Ecosystem
Bloom and Smith (2010)	Capabilities to Ecosystem
Bradach (2003)	Routes to Forms
Bradach (2009)	Minor linkage reference to Ecosystem supports - specifically looking at Franchise.
Bradach and Grindle (2014)	Routes -Some are more 'tips' to transformative scale: Very briefly refers to the need for capabilities.
Cannatelli, B. (2017)	Capabilities to Ecosystem
Dees, Anderson and Wei-Skillern (2004)	CSF to Forms to Routes to Supports
Desa and Koch (2014)	CSF to Routes to capabilities
Elkington and Hartigan (2008)	Routes to Ecosystem to Support
Gauthier, Ruane and Berry (2019)	Capabilities to Ecosystem
Han and Shah (2020)	Routes to Supports to Ecosystem to Capabilities
Lyon and Fernandez (2012)	Forms/Routes to Capabilities
Waitzer and Paul (2011)	Routes to Ecosystem

2017, Dey and Steyaert 2016), the research into what drives a social entrepreneur to scale is limited. However, research by Smith et al. (2016) finds that a desire for control by a social entrepreneur may influence the decisions made during the scaling process; specifically, the level of moral intensity experienced may influence which routes to scaling they follow. Scaling may also be **opportunity driven** when scaling is instigated by an opportunity from an external force such as a financial opportunity. By including drivers as a factor in our framework, we call attention to how the motivation to scale may influence the decisions made during the scaling process and might provide a point of reflection for the social entrepreneur to recognise this positioning and ensure all viable options are evaluated, eliminating any bias to ensure maximum social impact when scaling.

Factor: Forms of scaling

Elements: *Scale deep, Scale out, Scale up*

Moore et al., (2015) define the most common forms of scaling, which are discussed in the literature, as Scale Deep, Scale Out or Scale Up. A social enterprise may choose to '**Scale Deep'** by increasing its impact in its home community – where they are already serving the community. This approach is often used in W.I.S.E.s (Work Integrated Social Enterprises) where a social enterprise is creating employment for a marginalised group. The Irish social enterprise, Shuttleknit which provides employment to members of the Travelling community, is just one example of a social enterprise using a scale deep approach to change attitudes towards the Travelling community. A '**Scale Out**' approach seeks to spread its impact to other communities – when the same need is identified in a different community. 'Books At One' brings accessibility to bookshops to local areas where it may not be deemed commercially attractive to traditional commercial booksellers and is a prime example of a social enterprise using this approach. Books at One now operates in 3 locations around Ireland with further plans to scale out. A '**Scale Up**' approach seeks to impact systemic change by for example affecting policy. We see many examples of social enterprises in the circular economy using this approach such as The Rediscovery Centre that not only strive to demonstrate practical circular economy approaches through their Rediscover Fashion, Furniture, Paint and Cycling social enterprises but also have a focus on advocacy work to influence and change national policy.

Each of these types of scaling will require different approaches (Moore et al., 2015; Van den Bosch and Rotmans, 2008; Westley, Antadze, Riddell, Robinson and Geobey, 2014). What form of scaling the social enterprise is pursuing, scaling up, scaling out or scaling deep, will greatly affect what strategies and routes it will consider so it can achieve the anticipated social goal (Omann, Kammerlander, Jager, Bisaro and Tabara, 2020).

Factor: Critical Success Factors (CSF) in scaling

Elements: *Mission, Unbundling, Space, Resources*

Scaling a social enterprise is not an easy or straightforward path (Martin and Osberg, 2015). To determine which form of scaling the social enterprise will follow, it will first need to determine the Critical Success Factors (CSFs) involved in achieving the desired social impact of their mission (Dees et al. 2004). In his seminal paper, Rockart (1979, p. 5) defined critical success factors as "the limited number of areas in which results, if they are satisfactory, will ensure successful competitive performance for the organisation. They are the few key areas where things must go right for the business to flourish. If results in these areas are not adequate, the organisations efforts for the period will be less than desirable". If a social enterprise can identify which CSFs account for the most impact but require the least cost and effort, it will be an easier path to scale (Bradach and Grindle, 2014). Defining these CSFs is not simple; social enterprises need to dig deep into their existing operations and social impact strategies to determine what their core scalable CSFs are. Bradach and Grindle (2014) refer to this process as 'unbundling'. A social enterprise must put sufficient time and reflection into creating its social impact model and, during this process, interrogate each aspect of its operations. A social enterprise may find that it is its organisational model, its programme, or its principles that are the scalable element. For example, when a national network of public charter schools in the U.S., 'Knowledge is Power Program' (KIPP), realised they could scale out their successful social enterprise to achieve greater social impact, they first evaluated what their core elements for achieving social impact were. They found that great leadership is at the core of great schools. From this realisation, they have built 'KIPP's principal-training model', which enabled them to extend their social impact without adding significantly to their size (Cohodes, Setren and Walters, 2021). However, it is often not clear-cut, and the lines can be blurred regarding what the core scalable element is, or it may be a combination of several aspects of the enterprise's social value proposition. Gerald Chertavian, founder of social enterprise 'Year Up' uses the catchphrase - scaling what works; Year Up has been successfully addressing youth unemployment through short term intensive training

since 2000. Still, the challenge of low-income young adults out of work in the U.S. persists; Chertavian is keen to close the gap between what they have done and what still needs to be done (Bradach and Grindle 2014). He recognises that focusing solely on those their organisation directly serves, limits the potential of social impact. Instead, Chertavian, (2014, p.1) outlines the critical success factors as "establishing proof points, forging strong partnerships, and changing social norms across multiple sectors to drive real collective impact". For example, Year Up advocate to large corporations to remove screening criteria that may particularly impact low-income areas. This is why it is imperative that a social enterprise spends sufficient time considering their core strategic elements that are to be scaled for the most impact whilst choosing which form of scaling to follow.

An in-depth study by the BridgeSpan group, Ditkoff and Grindle (2017) uncovered five key critical success factors that were common among NGOs that had reached large-scale social impact, which can also be applicable to social enterprise. These include building a shared understanding of the problem and its ecosystem, setting a winnable milestone and honing a compelling message, designing approaches that will work at a massive scale, driving (rather than assuming) demand, and embracing course correction. To achieve this, a deep understanding of the social issue the social enterprise is addressing is needed, knowing how the **space** operates and interacts with other social issues is important. For example, homelessness cannot be addressed in isolation, often it is interlinked with mental health issues (Fischer and Breakey, 1985).The CSFs defined by an organisation will influence what **resources** are required and lead to a clearer understanding of how financing, their organisational model, technology, data, institutional frameworks, and government policy, impact and should be addressed when scaling their social enterprise (Bradach and Grindle, 2014; Han and Shah, 2020; Mulgan, 2006; Seelos and Mair, 2005). Seelos and Mair (2019) refer to the Green Zone when a social enterprise is effectively operating in its impact creation zone and positively managing any uncertainty. CSFs may be very specific to the social enterprise but without having a clear understanding of these CSFs, the social enterprise is less likely to achieve an increase in social impact success and operate in its Green Zone (Seelos and Mair, 2019).

Having understood its CSFs the social enterprise will then be better informed to start to look at the more practical and operational side of scaling. The routes to scaling, capabilities and supports – that are discussed next, are factors which continuously interact together to achieve sustained social impact.

Factor: Routes to scaling

Elements: *Bricolage, Supply Demand, Three-Step Strategies, Pathway Models*

After determining what is driving the scaling journey, what form of scaling is most appropriate and assessing targeted critical success factors, a social enterprise can begin with operational considerations such as the practical route it will take to scaling. Our conceptual model highlights that this is not a linear path. Social enterprises will need to circle back and re-imagine their scaling journey when faced with barriers or indeed additional opportunities.

Routes to scaling have received the most attention in the literature, and as we will see below, there are many options. The extant literature focuses on examining routes to scaling from different perspectives, including bricolage (Baker and Nelson, 2005), supply and demand (Mulgan, Tuck, Ali and Sanders, 2007), stage models for social impact scaling (Dees et al., 2004; Lyon and Fernandez, 2012) and pathway approaches (Elkington and Hartigan, 2008). We will now outline and consider the impacts of each of these routes on the process of scaling.

Bricolage

Baker and Nelson (2005) found that social enterprises have learned that achieving the desired social impact within the constraints they operate in requires them to apply and combine the know-how and resources they have available to them to address social issues, and this concept has become known as bricolage. Bricolage is the most common default route to scaling deployed, often without knowledge, by most social enterprises. Bricolage addresses critical needs and challenges by problem-solving using an iterative process where potential ideas and solutions are piloted, evaluated and implemented (Bacq, Ofstein, Kickul and Grundy, 2015) in an environment that is resource deficient (Garud and Karnøe, 2003). Entrepreneurs frequently use bricolage in the start-up phase as a necessity – and often with great success. However, it can, without sufficient consideration, become the de facto strategy of the organisation and have negative results. Dees et al. (2004, p.3) state the impact of remaining in a bricolage strategy can "blind social sector leaders to promising options and bias them towards a limited set of strategies."

The effectiveness and suitability of bricolage as a route to scaling have been widely debated. Bricolage has been found necessary and perhaps essential in new market disruption, but there is a curvilinear relationship between entrepreneurial bricolage and innovation as it ultimately restricts long-term growth (Busch and Barkema, 2020).

When looking at the factors presented in our conceptual model, defaulting to bricolage can result in significantly negative impacts on the scaling journey as it may prevent the social enterprise from seeking the crucial resources required to effect long-term impact (Kickul, Griffiths and Gundry, 2010).

Several researchers (Gabriel, 2014; Mulgan et al., 2007; Seelos and Mair, 2005; Waitzer and Paul, 2011) have put forward alternative models to propose the roadmap of progressing towards scaling social impact. We now consider some of the most common routes to scale that a social enterprise can deploy as an alternative to bricolage; we consider their appropriateness for application in a social enterprise context and how each may influence the scaling process.

Supply-Demand

The supply-demand route to scaling is most reflective of traditional commercial approaches to scaling. The basic premise is that when demand increases, supply increases, and therefore there is growth. Mulgan et al. (2007) argue that to effectively scale as an organisation; two factors must be present, an identifiable demand and sufficient capacity in an organisation to deliver and capitalise on the demand. In a social enterprise scaling context, this route to scaling was found to be effective when the need to engage with a given social issue is recognised by customers who are willing to pay for it, either directly (as an arms-length transaction) or indirectly (customers who pay for a good/service on behalf of those who cannot) (Westley and Antadze, 2010) . However, the supply-demand approach does not interrogate the effectiveness of the social innovation, so whilst there may be capacity within the organisation, and an identified or perceived short-term demand for the product or service provided by the social enterprise, the innovation itself may not be addressing and solving the underlying social issue. It is reasonable to suggest that a social enterprise pursuing this route to scaling might refer back to CSFs to identify what elements create social impact and proceed from there.

Stage Model for social impact scaling

A 'three-step strategy approach' to scaling social impact has been developed by several researchers to provide a clear and easy way to navigate the scaling process. The most debated in the literature are those by Dees et al. (2004) and Lyon and Fernandez (2012). Lyon and Fernandez (2012) put forward routes to scale that propose 1) organisational scaling, 2) scaling through formal relationships, and 3) scaling through open access. Organisational scaling can be pursued through a variety of routes; diversification, expansion of the number of services, expanding to new geographic locations, or increasing volume. These routes to scaling are complementary to the 'forms of scaling' (scaling up and scaling out) as outlined by Moore et al. (2015).

Organisational scaling is the most traditional route to scaling and is likely the most familiar to social enterprises; however, it may be focused on organisational growth and, similar to some of the short-comings discussed in the supply-demand model, may not sufficiently take into consideration the scaling of social impact as a primary focus of scaling for social enterprises (Islam, 2020a). This reinforces how imperative it is that a social enterprise has already identified and deeply understands its CSFs, before selecting organisational scaling as a route to scaling.

Another route to scaling, scaling through formal relationships, proposes deployments such as spin-out organisations, social franchising, and quality standards (Lyon and Fernandez, 2012). These routes to scaling are seen as causing less of a resource drain on the core social enterprise and may create an efficient way of scaling social impact. This approach creates a more sustainable path with adequate resources to cope with demand, but it also requires the relinquishment of some control which may present a challenge, particularly for founder social entrepreneurs. As highlighted earlier, a social entrepreneur's motivation to scale and desire for control may influence their consideration of this route to scale. Our proposed conceptual model considers the influence of each factor, prompting a social entrepreneur to consider their motivations before selecting or indeed dismissing a particular route to scaling.

There are some examples of successful social franchising as a route to scaling that have been adopted in Ireland with organisations such as Siel Bleu, which are a social franchise of a French organisation, and THE Homeshare, a social franchise of a UK model and most recently the UK social enterprise AMT acquired 55 coffee bars across Ireland and the UK to convert them into social enterprises. However, to the best of the authors' knowledge there is only one relatively new example of social franchising being used as a route to scale by Irish social enterprises 'Books At One'. This route to scaling is an underexplored option in research and practice and has a potential for further research with practical implications.

Open access methods such as training and accredited courses, establishing networks to share good practices, or providing open-source material and encouraging learning is another route to scaling that has been debated in the literature (Lyon and Fernandez, 2012). Adopting this route to scaling may result in the social enterprise having less control over the impact and having to rely on learners implementing and following the correct procedures and values of the social enterprise (Bretos, Diaz-Foncea and Marcuello, 2020). With the advances in technology, we have seen an increased number of social enterprises pursuing this route to scaling, such as Grow Remote, an Irish social enterprise that promotes remote working and assists employers and employees to adapt to remote working, has scaled significantly over the past year partially using an open access strategy (*Grow Remote*, 2022).

Using a comparative structure, Dees et al. (2004) also put forward a three-step strategy approach to scaling using the terms branch, affiliation, and dissemination. Dees et al. (2004) highlight that crucial to the success of a route to scaling is identifying the core elements or CSFs of the social enterprise that are key to scaling the social impact. Again, this serves as a reminder that the factors of scaling are closely interrelated and a social enterprise may need to iteratively review factors as they encounter fresh challenges.

There has been a significant reduction in the popularity of branching as an option for scaling over the past ten years from 77% to 33% within Ashoka fellows while affiliations, or partnerships have seen an increase from 70% to 86% (Waitzer and Paul, 2011). This could be due to the higher costs involved in scaling through branching or, perhaps more likely, the advancement of technology facilitating easier communication, training, and accountability.

Pathway model

Several researchers (Elkington and Hartigan, 2008; Gabriel, 2014; Mulgan et al., 2007; Seelos and Mair, 2005; Waitzer and Paul, 2011) have put forward a 'pathway model' to propose a model of scaling social innovation. Open-source change-making and smart networks have been discussed as being dual pathways to route to scaling set out by Waitzer and Paul (2011, p.144) in response to their finding that many "great social innovations too often remain local". Elkington and Hartigan (2008) point out that social enterprises are now reaching the consensus that scaling effectively occurs not through an enterprise but rather through an ecosystem.

There are several empirical examples of this ecosystem expansion model, such as Valid Nutrition, a social enterprise that produces a ready-to-use food product to address malnutrition. Their philosophy is not to import solutions into the developing world, but to add value to society and industry locally (*Valid Nutrition*, 2021). This approach supports the development of a sustainable ecosystem where the supplier farmers have a secured income, and there is a multiplier effect on local communities, resulting in Valid Nutrition increasing their impact without adding additional organisational capacity.

Like Valid Nutrition, many social enterprises now realise they are more successful when integrated as part of a wider ecosystem (Montgomery, Dacin and Dacin, 2012). This has led to the increased development of smart networks. Smart networks reflect the position that a single organisation cannot achieve large-scale social change without support. A mission-centred smart network can deliver much more significant results than a lone operating social enterprise (Waitzer and Paul, 2011). The interactions of a scaling social enterprise with the ecosystem are further discussed in a later section.

We see similarities in Mulgan et al. (2007) five pathways to scale: advocacy, networks, programmes, franchising, and direct control, and more recent research (Elkington and Hartigan, 2008; Han and Shah, 2020; Weber, Kroeger, et al., 2012). Elkington and Hartigan (2008) see the key to scaling as requiring collaborative leadership and the mapping of key agents. In their 5-stage pathway to scale, they have created a model of change charting a social enterprise's progress through the stages of Eureka, Experiment, Enterprise, Ecosystem, and System Change, with the crucial space of scaling in the transition from enterprise to scaling.

A social enterprise may select the most relevant approach or a combination of approaches and adapt them at different times. It is important to note that social enterprise's strategic choices in its early days may influence its future evolution (Bauwens, Huybrechts and Dufays, 2020) and so this needs due consideration. We have outlined several of the varied routes to scaling discussed in the literature. Rather than examining them in isolation, it is vital we begin to fully understand their interconnectivity and influence. Without considering the influence of factors such as drivers to scale and CSFs not only from the outset of the scaling journey but throughout the process, a social enterprise could inadvertently make a costly choice. Whilst each of these routes to scaling may create an increase in social impact, they will only be successful if applied in the right conditions.

Factor: Readiness and capabilities development

Elements: *Barriers, Resources, Systems*

Underpinning the route to scaling is the readiness and capabilities development of a social enterprise. This is a key factor in terms of execution. Readiness is a factor that has also received much attention in the literature and is a feature in many approaches which highlight how a social enterprise can determine and evaluate what it needs to have in place to successfully scale. A social enterprise planning to scale will need to evaluate what the **systems** are first. These can include technology, finance, HR systems a social enterprise needs in place to ensure it has a greater infrastructure in place to manage an increased remit (Bloom and Chatterji, 2009; Bloom and Smith, 2010; Cannatelli, 2017; Dees et al., 2004; Gauthier et al., 2019; Weber et al., 2012). We propose that through understanding their CSFs and selecting their route to scaling, a social enterprise may discover the need for new, different **resources** such as enhanced capabilities and skills to be in place to operationally execute their scaling plan. The ability of the social enterprise in the securing or non-securing of these capabilities may mean the type of scaling, the route to scaling or indeed the CSFs need to be re-adjusted. This again highlights how closely interlinked each factor in the process of scaling may be. If a social enterprise does not understand their CSFs, they may have inadequate systems in place or implement the wrong resources which could have a detrimental effect to the social impact it achieves. Scaling a social enterprise is far more complex than in the commercial sector, as the focus is not on simply growing an organisation (Austin, Stevenson and Wei-Skillern, 2006).

To aid with the process of evaluating required capabilities, Dees et al. (2004) put forward the '5 R's Model'. Following through the process of evaluating 'Readiness, Receptivity, Resources, Risks and Returns', a social enterprise can identify how they are ready to scale and what gaps need to be addressed to scale successfully. Following on from determining readiness – the organisation must look at receptivity, resources, risks, and returns before determining if the social enterprise is ready to scale. If through this process, the social enterprise determines it is not ready to scale or encounters significant **barriers,** such as the inability to secure resources, it will have identified key areas for development to get them to that readiness stage. This can help as a point of reflection; a social enterprise may discover that they need to revisit their routes to scaling to simplify and allow them to proceed or perhaps seek a collaborative partner; it also shows how social enterprises may move between the factors of the model rather than following a set linear path.

When moving through the above-outlined process of the 5R model, a social enterprise will likely spend considerable time evaluating the resources required. To carry out this evaluation of resources, the SCALERS model may be useful (Bloom and Chatterji, 2009). Perhaps the most well-documented model of social enterprise scaling is known by the acronym SCALERS (**s**taffing, communications, alliance building, lobbying, earnings generation, replication, and stimulating market forces), which outlines necessary capabilities a social enterprise might need to achieve success in scaling (Bloom and Chatterji, 2009). The capabilities the social enterprise has must deliver the identified CSFs of the social enterprise. For example, Irish social enterprise 'Women for Elections' sees advocacy as one of their CSFs to deliver their goal of systemic change within the Irish political system, so the skillset of advocacy and campaign management is likely to be a capability they require on their team. This model recognises that each of the SCALERS drivers or capabilities is impacted by external situational contingencies such as potential allies, access to start-up capital, public support, labour needs, supportive public policy, or dispersion of beneficiaries. These situational contingencies can either enhance or suppress the influence of the SCALER's capabilities in a social enterprise. Deployment of all SCALERS at the same time may not be required for successful scaling; for example, a social enterprise may achieve significant success in scaling without using lobbying tactics, or it may be the key driver of success in its scaling.

As a result of their empirical research, Gauthier et al. (2019) more recently suggested two further capabilities necessary for effective scaling – internal systems (processes and procedures used to run the organisation) and client selection (deciding which clients to serve and equally which not to). Whilst these additions are of interest, it is of note that their empirical research was limited to a sole organisation and so requires further endorsement. However, this research does further reinforce that a more connected, global approach is required for scaling.

The operational strategies a social enterprise will deploy to achieve its planned scaling has been the focus of several researchers (Bloom and Smith, 2010; Bradach, 2003, 2009; Bradach and Grindle, 2014; Elkington and Hartigan, 2008; Mulgan, 2006). It is within the operational strategies that we see the closest comparisons to for-profit organisations (Bradach and Grindle, 2014). For example, Bradach (2009) outlines some key tools and tactics that social enterprises have used to expand their impact far beyond what would seem possible from their size.

These are practical, operational strategies that a social enterprise can utilise to scale their impact as opposed to their organisations, but they do rely on a very strong organisational core. Many of these strategies reflect the advances in technologies that allow organisations to scale at lower costs – for example, 'convert bricks to clicks' models have seen social enterprises using and creating platforms that can be easily expanded, resulting in the moving of resources to an online platform as opposed to a traditional physical expansion. The Irish social enterprise Thriftify is an excellent example of this model, working alongside traditional brick and mortar charity shop models to create an online platform to help charity shops reach more customers without a costly physical expansion and using AI technology to maximise the experience. Using the Thriftify partner platform, a charity shop in a remote area can easily access customers across the country regardless of their location.

Mulgan et al. (2007) highlight some of the key capabilities that are deemed necessary and need to be explored to facilitate successful scaling – such as leadership. The right leadership is crucial in any organisation, but the complex and varied demands on a social enterprise leader are particularly challenging. Social enterprises are in pursuit of social and commercial goals, which, far from being complementary, are often associated with conflicting identities, value systems, and norms (Battilana and Dorado, 2010; Tracey, Phillips and Jarvis, 2011). We can understand these competing goals using the Paradox Theory – which offers a view into the complex nature of managing competing demands in an organisation (Smith, Binns and Tushman, 2010). The leadership of social enterprises must manage these competing demands simultaneously. Smith, Besharov, Wessels and Chertok (2012) delved deeper into this issue and created a paradoxical leadership model for social entrepreneurs to help manage these conflicts. The model outlines three skills that a social enterprise leader must embrace to manage these competing demands - Acceptance, Differentiation, and Integration. The model highlights key skills in each of these stages, which are not typically comparable with skills required in commercial settings. Rather than consistently prioritising one demand over the other – a social enterprise leader must learn to embrace the differences and learn to make sense of them in a different way, reframing contradictions from 'Either/Or' dilemmas to 'both/and possibilities' (Bartunek and Franzak, 1988). Although there is a common acknowledgement of these competing demands, there is little research to identify the skills required to manage them in a complementary manner that avoids consistent conflict or re-prioritisation. As the social and commercial demands of the social enterprise grow, there can be a fundamental lack of understanding as to how to integrate these two goals, and they are dealt with in isolation rather than in tandem (Smith et al., 2012). With the increased offering of third-level education focusing specifically on social enterprises, there are more opportunities for learning how to manage these challenges (Halsall, Oberoi and Snowden 2022). In social enterprises that are working with vulnerable individuals, the front-line staff and support staff may be in agreement with the overarching goal of the social enterprise but may differ on how things run operationally on a day-to-day basis. In start-up mode, it can be easier to keep all staff members aligned, but as the organisation grows and more formal structures and governance are necessary, it is imperative to ensure the overarching goals and operational goals remain closely aligned (Rigby, Sutherland and Noble, 2018). Failure to recognise this challenge may result in a reluctance of the social enterprise to accept the need for new capabilities or enhanced systems which may lead to failed scaling attempts.

Factor: Supports

Elements: Financial, External expertise, Governance

When a social enterprise has determined the specific capabilities it requires for scaling, there will invariably be gaps that cannot be filled by its existing or proposed resources. These required supports may be temporary, such as consultant support or longer-term **financial** support with investment or loans.

Increasingly social enterprises engage with the wider ecosystem of funders, advocates, educational institutions, or network organisations to leverage the **external support and expertise** required. The importance of external support and, indeed the need for organisations to garner political and social support to achieve their social goals has been well documented (Bacq and Eddleston, 2018; Bloom and Skloot, 2010; Santos, Pache and Birkholz, 2015). The Irish social enterprise ecosystem is made up of policy and statute, research and education, networks, support and advocacy and financial intermediaries (O'Shaughnessy, 2016).

Scaling in social enterprise occurs more recently not through an enterprise but rather as an ecosystem (Elkington and Hartigan, 2008). An ecosystem is defined as "an array of interacting organisations, individuals (collectively related to as "actors"), elements, relationships, and conditions that either enable or impede innovation" (Hoffecker, 2018, p.14) and, more specifically, a social enterprise ecosystem is defined as a set of attributes that collectively creates a conducive environment for social enterprises to thrive (Bloom and Dees, 2008).

Han and Shah (2020) and Weber, Kroeger, et al. (2012) put forward two models of scaling through ecosystems. The ecosystem of scaling social impact theoretical framework which was created by Han and Shah (2020) integrates both systemic and organisational level factors. This framework highlights five key elements: financing, processing of scaling (organisational level factors), government policy, and institutional infrastructure (systemic level factors), and outlines the relationship between each element. Within the process of scaling elements, different strategies are used by organisations to scale their social impact. These strategies are underpinned by technology and data (Crutchfield and Grant, 2012). This framework aims to understand how to scale a social enterprise beyond solely organisational growth to include the growth of social impact. The networks, associations, and intermediaries can amplify the impact of the sector by creating the standard and criteria across the board (Han and Shah, 2020). This framework is innovative in its attempt to incorporate the existing potential support and influence of external factors like government policy and institutional infrastructure (governance).

With social enterprises operating in a more connected world than ever, it is evident from the literature that they must take account of the world around them, leveraging external supports and being aware of external influences. In Ireland, we have seen an increase in the ecosystem supports available to social enterprises through both governmental initiatives such as Awareness Raising Initiatives for Social Enterprises (ARISE) (DRCD, 2021) and intermediaries' accelerators such as Rethink Ireland (Rethink Ireland 2022). However, growth through an ecosystem also comes with a cautionary tale that the social enterprise needs to ensure it is aware of potential unintended consequences of scaling through an ecosystem; for example, a social enterprise engaging in strong advocacy work may trigger hostile government relations, which could have a negative impact in the future (Islam, 2020b). It is important to consider the influence these choices may have when scaling, for example a grass-roots social enterprise engaged in advocacy may not experience the same challenges as a nationally co-ordinated organisation.

More recent research focuses on an ecosystem approach of scaling, recognising that key actors and stakeholders involved in the development of a social enterprise can act as significantly influential supports (Han and Shah, 2020). We see other more practical developments of this approach with Scotland that has declared itself as 'the most supportive in the world for social enterprises' (Roy, McHugh, Huckfield, Kay and Donaldson, 2015 p.1). This statement is largely supported by their development of a comprehensive ecosystem including social procurement, a supportive policy, the availability of financial and non-financial supports for social enterprise (Roy et al., 2015).

Research like Han and Shah's (2020) framework starts to bring together and interconnect the relationship of different key elements both internally and externally. These concepts look to address the social enterprise holistically, but there has been limited empirical research on the effectiveness of this approach.

ECOSYSTEM

We have discussed scaling ecosystems in the context of growth by ecosystem; however, whether a social enterprise chooses to strategically grow by ecosystem or not, the wider ecosystem will have a considerable impact on all social enterprises. The policy landscape and institutional framework will play a key role in how supportive a country specific ecosystem is (Roy et al., 2015).

CONCEPTUAL MODEL

The considerations, factors and elements discussed thus far form a complex and challenging journey for social enterprises that seek to scale their impact. The conceptual model visually represents this as the lock of a safe because the combination, or navigation, of the scaling journey will be different for each social enterprise. Not all factors will be necessarily applicable to every social enterprise, but rather the model proposes factors and elements that a social enterprise needs to consider when navigating its journey to increased social impact. The model is deliberately not presented as a linear process but is portrayed as a journey where the different factors and elements need to be considered not in isolation but with cognisance of how they fit in with the other factors to form the final scaling process.

The social enterprise may move iteratively between the different factors as the social enterprise needs to make what is known in the commercial space as entrepreneurial adjustments based on real-time information or challenges it encounters (Parker, 2006). For example, the driver to scale may come from the ecosystem in the

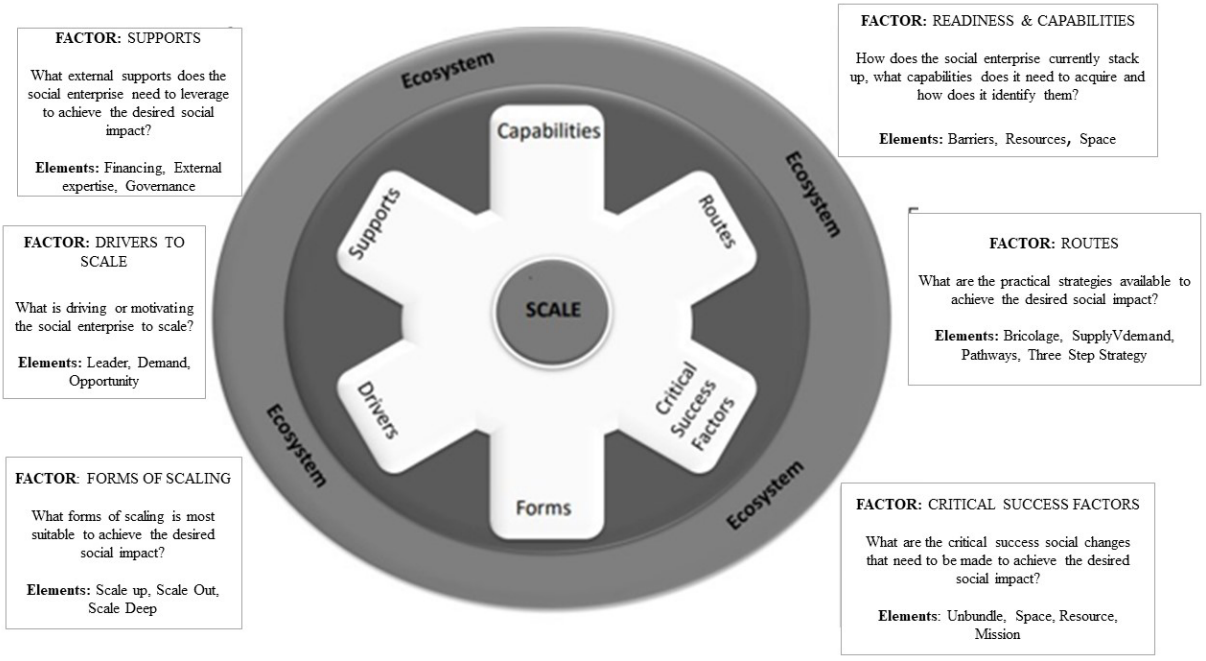


Figure 1: Factors and Elements of the scaling process (Author's own)

form of government grants [opportunity driven]; identifying the CSFs may lead the social enterprise to focus on readiness and capability before moving to explore the routes to scale. Another example may be where a social enterprise may be clear on what CSFs they require to achieve great social impact; however, they may be unable to secure the necessary capabilities or support to achieve these CSFs which may result in a phased approach, or a reduction in social impact achieved, or there may be a CSF they have overlooked which requires them to revisit and pivot their scaling process. For example, Via Via Travellers Cafe, a global franchise of social enterprises, added the owning of a property as a CSF after significant negative experiences with landlords created issues with their scaling endeavours (Dobson, Boone, Andries and Daou, 2018).

CONCLUSION

The paper delves into the most debated social enterprise scaling models and looks at their most critical aspects, using empirical examples to showcase their theoretical relevance and practical applicability and highlight where they are most appropriate. The conceptual model developed (Figure 1) breaks down the internal strategic, organisational, and operational level considerations a social enterprise reflects upon when pursuing scaling.

To date, these considerations have been explored primarily in isolation and the interdependencies of each consideration have not been given sufficient attention. The contribution of this paper to research lies in the presented conceptual model that helps to identify the factors and elements that a social enterprise needs to pay heed to in a scaling journey and how they are interconnected.

The conceptual model presented is not empirically tested yet which is a limitation of this paper, however the discussion presented in this paper will form the basis of future empirical research that will investigate how social enterprises in Ireland are currently scaling. Those findings will further inform and reshape the conceptual model presented here. Further empirical refinement of the conceptual model will lead to a greater understanding of how decisions are made during the scaling process and what is influencing these decisions. This is important as it adds understanding of diverse experiences of scaling, how social enterprise decision makers can influence the scaling process and ultimately scale up successfully. Additionally, we can gain further insights into how government policy or institutional supports can play a role in ensuring social enterprises can succeed in addressing complex

social issues. Further research into the influence and interaction between factors could uncover if certain factors or elements are more influential and further define interdependencies.

Social enterprises operate under a wide range of legal types, and this may impact the options available to them when scaling. This has not been explored in this paper and presents both a limitation of this paper but also an opportunity for future research to investigate how legal type impacts scaling.

A vital part of research in social enterprise is to inform practice in the sector, and the contribution of this model once validated is that it will prompt social enterprises to consider the broader scaling process and pay adequate attention to all factors and elements of the scaling journey. As such, this paper sets a foundation from which further research on scaling in social enterprise can emerge. Thus further research could be to explore issues such as the different scaling journeys that social enterprises may take, or to further explore of the interrelationship between the factors that play a part in the scaling process.

BIO-NOTES

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Dr. Ziene Mottiar is a researcher and senior lecturer in the School of Tourism and Hospitality Management in Technological University Dublin. She is an active researcher with more than 30 peer reviewed articles in journals such as Annals of Tourism Research, International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management and Journal of Sustainable Tourism. She has also been involved in a number of national and European funded research projects. Her key areas of research interest are Entrepreneurship, Social Enterprise, Destination Development and Teaching and Learning.

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